

**TIIAP FY 1999**  
**Project Narrative**

Clinch-Powell Resource Conservation  
Development Council

Grant # 47-60-99041  
Community Networking  
Rutledge, Tennessee

## PROJECT NARRATIVE

### Project Definition

Five counties in northeast Tennessee -- Claiborne, Grainger, Hancock, Hawkins and Union - have been designated a federal Enterprise Community, and expect over a 10 year period to be using \$140 million to \$250 million on a comprehensive set of projects to bring progress in community and economic development. The Tele-Democracy Network is in direct support of the Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community Strategic Plan and directly impacts Goal D.3: ***Telecommunications are a well developed support system in the Zone for education, business and personal development.*** Further it meets Strategy D.3.1.1.1: ***Install local telecommunication centers within a 30 minute drive of all Zone residents.***

We are absolutely dedicated to overcoming “business as usual” mentality. Our problem is sustaining community input into the EC over the long haul, and keeping its representative board functioning effectively, so that it can continue to be responsive to the real needs of the community as our plans are implemented. We want to move from consideration of community input to empowerment and involvement of people in all segments of the community, especially those who are underserved. The low income, poorly-educated and isolated residents will be especially impacted through this Tele-Democracy project. There are several types of obstacles contributing to this problem.

One is geography. The 29,000 people in our Enterprise Community are spread out over 677 square miles (5 counties) of rugged terrain, that takes 2.5 hours to travel from one end to the other. This discourages most community citizens from meeting with people from other counties in the EC, as we saw at the topical focus group meetings held during the planning when only 125 of the 350 (approx. 30%) invited people attended.

Economics is another obstacle. Average per capita income in the five counties of the Enterprise Community is \$14,236. Many of the citizens in our Enterprise Community are poor (31.6% officially) and cannot afford to travel to gatherings outside the county; many of those who are employed earn so little that they work a second job or farm to make ends meet, and thus have little time for community meetings and involvement, especially when it means travelling.

Finally, there are cultural obstacles: there is not a strong tradition of participation in civic meetings, perhaps partly because local people have been allowed so little voice in community decisions. While the Enterprise Community plan aims at changing this situation and giving them a strong voice in the many improvements planned, people are not yet used to being given the opportunity to participate. Even the highly motivated people on the Enterprise Community Board have trouble making meetings because of some of these factors; we are concerned because representation on this governing body of the EC is one important way of making our Enterprise Community responsive to people from all over the region, yet our average attendance at Board meetings has been only 53%, and at only 60% of the meetings one or more counties have not been represented.

The solution we propose is three-fold: First, a network of videoconferencing sites with one in each county, such that 20-30 people at each site could take part in a videoconference with people from the other 4 counties. We would promote the use of this network of sites by publishing weekly notices in local papers, radio PSA's, posters in the community, upcoming Enterprise Community meetings and other events using the Network. The same publicity channels could be used to promote the Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community Web Site, which

would have an updated schedule of events as well as updated information on all the existing and proposed programs of the Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community. At the beginning of the project and at least yearly thereafter we would repeat this same promotion in local churches and civic groups. We would encourage videoconferences of women's clubs, of chambers from each county, and of churches and other groups so they could get introduced to the new technology. We would explain each time how to use the videoconference session, and official Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community board and committee meetings would include time for people to use the network to ask questions, suggest ideas, and raise concerns.

Secondly, staff of the Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community will create a web page for the Enterprise Community which will include information on proposed and implemented programs of the Enterprise Community, a schedule of upcoming board and committee meetings and other events to which the public is invited, and a user-friendly method of asking questions and submitting opinions or other input.

Among the 21 volunteer Board members of the Enterprise Community, one works at a bank with public walk-in space, one at a funeral home, four at Chambers or nonprofits with walk-in public spaces; three work at schools, one at a Job Training Partnership Act office and six in government offices or senior centers open to the public. Part of our solution is to loan 12 of these board members with loaned PC's equipped for Internet-based videoconferencing. Two additional computers made available in-kind to the project will be equipped with video conferencing cameras from the grant which will increase public access. One is located in a nonprofit office and one in a school. These smaller-scale sites will serve two purposes: improving participation by Enterprise Community Board members in Board and Committee meetings, and adding 14 (12 direct, 2 in-kind) sites where community citizens can walk in and get access to an Enterprise Community website. The website will have descriptions of the programs proposed and underway, schedules for various meetings, and opportunities for leaving comments or questions.

In addition, one laptop will be purchased for use by the Network Coordinator in promoting the program, training and maintaining the network. A portable LCD Projector will be purchased for staff and board members to take to civic group meetings, businesses, and other community settings to explain to community members how to use the Enterprise Community website, and to demonstrate how videoconferencing works and what it makes possible with the intention of promoting use of the larger videoconferencing sites. In year one, two laptops have been pledged for rental to use in the above manner to allow maximum promotion of the program in the early stages.

We expect that the proposed communications sites scattered throughout the area will remove some of the barriers discouraging local citizens from providing their input into the important decisions related to the Enterprise Community. We expect to double the number of citizens participating in the Enterprise Community (via meetings, videoconferences, and website) from the 1314 participating during the Plan creation, to 2628 in the third year of the Clinch-Powell Tele-Democracy Network. We also expect to increase attendance at Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community Board meetings of board members representatives from each county, from the present 53% to 80% attendance by the end of three years.

An exciting and much anticipated auxiliary use of the Network will be what we are calling the content-delivery system. We have identified sector coordinators who have committed to organize and coordinate a regional network of like professionals to utilize the Network for sector based sessions (public safety, social services, education and business/industry). This will result by the end of the grant period in at least 3 cooperative projects among public safety personnel

from the different counties, in at least 15 more trainings for local business and industry, at least 20 other educational, enrichment, or in-service events for local citizens (including sessions targeted to welfare-to-work participants). This effort will be spearheaded by the Tele-Democracy Project Committee which is composed of one representative from each County Project Subcommittee, two representatives from ETSU (one from the Office of Information Technology and one from the Office of Community Partnerships) and, one representative from Northeast TN Technical Community College, Sprint, four sector coordinators, the project director and the network administrator.

County Project Subcommittees will be formed to meet on the average of once a month to make recommendations for program improvement and to share the opinions of the community on the Tele-Democracy Network to staff and to the Project Committee at its meetings (bimonthly the first year and quarterly after that). County Committees shall consist of the three County representatives on the Enterprise Community Board, the County Executive, a representative of the site where the Videoconference Center is located (e.g. Library, Bank, High School etc.) at least one low-income resident, and other county residents as desired.

## Evaluation

This section describes our plan for evaluating the outcomes of the Tele-Democracy Network. It reviews our plan for collecting and compiling evaluative data on the project and reporting the results to the funder, the project staff, and other key audiences.

Evaluation has been an integral part of the program design. We will use the Suchman (1967) evaluation model and strive to measure the effort, efficiency, effectiveness and process of the project. Because we are setting up a system that we believe is innovative and extremely replicable, we want to conduct a thorough evaluation to aid others as they adopt the model in their communities.

Outcomes to be evaluated	Information to be collected	Methods for data collection	How will data be compiled and analyzed	When – on what schedule	Who is responsible	How results are reported or used
<i>Effort:</i> How many citizens participate in Tele-Democracy Network	Number of people	1. Sign in sheets 2. Number of hits on website	Logs will be entered into database	Data collected with every use	Network Administrator	Tool to measure increase in participation. Reported to funder, EC board, Proj. Director, etc.
<i>Effort:</i> How many teleconferencing sessions held	Number of sessions	Session report	Data kept to establish baseline and then compare increasing use	Every time a session is held	Network Administrator	Report to Project Cmt, EC Board, funder, Proj. Director
<i>Efficiency:</i> Cost per session and cost per participant	Total costs and number of participants	Data from financial books	Divide total costs session and by participants	Annually	Project Director	Report to funder, project cmte, EC board
<i>Outcome:</i> Increase in public participation	Number of participants	1. Sign in logs 2. Number of hits on	Comparison with baseline data	Annually and final	Project Director	Report to funder, project cmt, EC board and

		website				public
<i>Outcome:</i> Increase in EC board efficiency	Attendance at EC board mtgs, key interviews	1. Attendance records in mtg minutes 2. Interview responses say system increases their value and participation as a board member.	1. Percentage comparison with baseline year 2. Responses show positive experience and ranking as board member	Annually and final	Project Director	Report to funder, project cmt, EC board
<i>Outcome:</i> Participant satisfaction and value derived from tele-communication experience	Satisfaction of experience and information received and given in session	1. Session evals using rating system 2. Key interviews 3. Comments on website	1. Compile ratings 2. Subjective compilation of comments	1. Quarterly 2. Semi-annually	Project Cmt, Network Administrator	Report to funder, EC board, Project Coord.
<i>Process:</i> Telecommunication experience was meaningful	Value of experience is high	Evaluation survey shows service/experience made a positive difference	Compile evaluation answers	Quarterly	Project Cmt., Network Administrator	Report to funder, EC board, Project Coord.
<i>Process:</i> Partners experience in collaborative project	Focus group	Partners believe experience and results had a positive cost/benefit ratio. Would do it again.	Facilitated sessions	Annually	Project Director	Report to funder, partners, EC board, Project Cmte.

## Significance

Not only will this Tele-Democracy Network meet critical needs in this region, but will also provide a model for increasing community participation in community decisions and development in any situation where there are geographic, income, or certain cultural barriers to this participation. In particular, rural Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities and other regional development efforts that value being community-driven in particular will benefit from the experience of how well the Clinch-Powell Tele-Democracy Network works. With a clear baseline of the number of citizens participating in EC planning, the Project will be able to measure the increased involvement in two technological methods of involvement, the videoconferencing network and visits to the Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community Web Site. The double layer importance of this project is clear. As we strive to evolve 11 census tracts carved from five counties into a homogenous region through the Enterprise Community, the ability to connect the people is critical. For example, disenfranchised people in one county need to know that their needs are echoed in the other counties and understand that solutions can be shared.

## Project Feasibility

*Technical Approach.* This project will be complex, but we are confident in the feasibility of the design and the partners involved. Every effort has been made to get written commitment letters to avoid misunderstandings later. The Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community Tele-Democracy Network will house at the Hawkins County Videoconference Community Group site a Smartlink Multiconference unit which supports up to 8 simultaneous connections. Each of the five county Videoconference Community Group sites and the one community college Videoconference College Group site will use a VTel TC1000 videoconferencing unit with the following: a single 27" monitor, an Adtran ACE III ISDN modem, a Elmo document camera with fluorescent light, an LCD projector, and a screen. The ISDN modem was chosen separately in order to assure it is covered by a warranty separate from the warranty of the computer. The Elmo document camera was chosen due to its ability to serve as a switching device for displaying additional audio and video signals from devices such as camcorders, VCRs, etc. The LCD projector and screen were chosen to allow projection of the video image for workshops of 20 to 30 people.

The Videoconference College Group Site at East Tennessee State University will upgrade existing VTel equipment with software and hardware changes needed to be compatible with the above-described network. In addition, this site will require the new modem and Elmo. Projector will not be required since we envision this site primarily as a send site.

While the equipment described above is proprietary, the communications protocols it uses are not. This equipment is interoperable with virtually all modern videoconferencing equipment. Further, the MCU selected will support videoconferencing up to T-1 bandwidth, even though we have chosen to operate at ISDN-BRI or 128 KB/sec rates, in order to use existing connectivity and keep the line charges portion of the operations and maintenance costs at a minimum. However, the additional bridge capacity would allow for a change to a higher bandwidth if that need arose. In addition, other MCUs can be added to the selected MCU if the system expands to more sites beyond our original concept of operation.

This technology was chosen over higher bandwidth Interactive Television or Desktop Videoconferencing systems because we were concerned about the cost of the bandwidth as we assume the operational costs in the out years. In addition, the relatively compact and portable nature of these desktop video systems combined with their lower cost (as compared to ITV fixed classrooms) makes them ideal for this application. It would also allow the systems to be used for non-videoconferencing instruction, such as supporting the use of a PowerPoint slide show at a community meeting. Finally, each of the chosen sites has ISDN installed, decreasing the installation costs.

This plan is scalable, with options to add Walters State Community College or other centers in the out years. This is possible without upgrading the switch since we envision normally only one member of the Videoconference College Group, typically send sites, connected at any given time. Sprint will provide installation and maintenance. Their technicians are the most experienced technical support staff in the area. Training will be provided by the Office of Information Technology from East Tennessee State University. The ETSU OIT staff is especially skilled in training non-technical people on how to use technologies, especially video-based. ETSU's staff currently supports over 50 hours of various forms of video-based instruction weekly, and ETSU's Academic Technology Support staff includes Dr. Richard A. Ranker, who has conducted numerous workshops on how to use desktop video effectively.

*Applicant Qualifications.* The key members of the applicant team have the expertise, experience and skills needed to make this a very successful project and we believe, a sustainable one. A listing of personnel and duties are found in the appendices. The grantee, Clinch-Powell

RC&D Council, serves as fiscal agent for the Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community. The RC&D is a 501C3 nonprofit organization serving the exact territory covered in this Tele-Democracy project. The RC&D has extensive experience with managing federal grants and is familiar and in compliance with applicable circulars. The RC&D receives an annual independent single governmental audit.

Budget, Implementation Schedule and Timeline. Please review the appendices for these items.

Sustainability. While it will be a challenge, we believe that we can sustain this project beyond the grant period. With the designation of the Enterprise Community, we expect to a great deal of growth and development in the region. Although the designation was only made in January, we already have several promising prospects for industrial development. We anticipate tremendous growth and proliferation of uses for the Network. We expect that as growth occurs, so will the need and the market for the Video Conferencing Centers for job training, remote meetings, etc. We also expect a high demand for use of the system from the education sector. By the fourth year we expect the centers to be used an average of three times per week. Rental for use is expected to cover the annual operations and maintenance costs of \$64,000. We expect the partners committed for this grant to continue at least for the ten year duration of the Enterprise Community.

### **Community Involvement**

Community input during the Enterprise Community planning process in 1998 identified need for improved government and leadership, but citizens were not specific on how community participation in particular could be improved. A survey was devised in 1999 to ask this question, as well as their own willingness to participate, and to see what role local residents thought technology might play in increasing citizen participation. A total of 143 residents of the Enterprise Community completed surveys; of these, all recognized the need for citizen participation, but varied widely in their ability to participate through attending meetings (see Survey Summary, attached.) While 71% favored more public Internet sites as a way to increase participation, a still larger number, 82%, stated that having a videoconference center in each county would help increase participation. Of the number favoring a videoconferencing center, 30 or 26% were persons who did not have computers, email or access to the Internet. In order to increase citizen participation, it was decided to use both videoconferencing centers and the PC's being made available to Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community Board to increase their board effectiveness, as public access computers to increase the opportunity for residents to visit the Enterprise Community Web Site. Community involvement will continue during implementation through periodic user evaluations and membership on local County Project Subcommittees.

### **Reducing Disparities**

Creating sites throughout the Clinch-Powell Enterprise Community area will help those persons who might be prevented or discouraged by economic factors to participate in discussions and decisions of the Enterprise Community. Having videoconference sites nearer to their home will make travel easier and cheaper for those who might be discouraged by the cost of attending; and also will make the time commitment shorter for those who work more than one job for the economic survival of themselves and their families. It will also make it easier to participate for seniors who might otherwise hesitate to travel so far after dark, when the majority of meetings will likely take place. Locating sites in schools and other public places also increase the possibility that youth will participate.

## Documentation and Dissemination

This section describes our plan to extend the importance of the Tele-Democracy Network by disseminating the project results widely to audiences throughout the state, region and nation. It details the steps project staff will take to ensure that methods and technology are understood and accepted widely. We know that people resist change. We are in an area where more people own homes than telephones. Diligently promoting the results of evaluations to the community will continue to whittle down resistance and promote increased usage of the systems. This is a real paradigm shift for the culture of this region and documentation and dissemination of findings will prove valuable to our program as well as to others across the nation who face the same or similar geographic, social, cultural and economic barriers. This is especially true on a region basis where isolation and low population density is a challenge. We will document the project using the tools and methods listed in the evaluation section. They are sign in logs, website hits, session reports, cost/benefit ratio, attendance records at board meetings, key interview notes, session evaluations, meeting minutes, videotaping and notes from focus group sessions. Additionally, match for in-kind services will be documented according federal cost principles in mind.

Our strategies for promoting dissemination utilization are outlined in the following chart.

<b>Strategy for <i>Disseminating</i> Project Results</b>	<b>Strategies for Promoting <i>Utilization</i> of Project Results</b>
Conference presentations	Frequently monitor evaluations from participants involved in activities but at least monthly.
Post key comments, information, etc. from Videoconferencing activity on the Clinch-Powell Website	Use suggestions and recommendations from users to continuously improve website.
Publish data and results in newsletter	
Post progress and results of listserv for the RC&Ds in the country	
Reports at EC board meetings, cmte meetings	
Presentations at civic, govt and other meetings.	

Because we are part of the growing Enterprise Community/Empowerment Zone network, we will be using that avenue to disseminate our results widely. Additionally, because the lead entity (flow through grantee) is a Resource Conservation and Development Council we will utilize the RC&D network to get the results out as well. There are 315 RC&D councils across the country covering more than 70% of the nation. RC&Ds are regional rural development organizations who focus on community development and protection of natural resources. These will be excellent tools for dissemination. Because we have strong partnerships and active involvement in place with East Tennessee State University and Northeast TN Technical Community College we know that these academic and technical networks will be excellent methods to disseminate results as well. Several members of the Enterprise Community Board are members of organizations which could benefit from a community networking system like this. We expect those board members will also disseminate information at professional and affiliation meetings including banking, rural health, economic development, education and social services. Of course we will utilize our website as an “instantaneous” way to disseminate information.